

By [Jane Koropsak](#) | May 25, 2012

Little Kids, Big Hearts

Local Students Gather Donations for Troops

Inside the walls of the quaint Nassakeag Elementary School in Setauket, students have been very busy — busy collecting and packing up boxes of supplies for U.S. troops. The supplies were donated to the Lab's AdoptaPlatoon (AAP) group, who will mail the boxes to deployed military personnel. The donated items include various toiletries, socks, ready-to-eat soup, pillows, hand warmers, and games.



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Students and staff from Nassakeag Elementary School with BNL AdoptaPlatoon volunteers. The students filled 50 boxes with supplies for U.S. troops.

Upon arriving at the school, BNL AAP volunteers John McCaffrey and Michael Paquette were astounded when they walked into the classroom and found a tower of 50 large boxes decorated in red, white and blue, and all filled to the brim with supplies. "My jaw dropped. There were so many boxes that I thought they might just be props for a photo," said McCaffrey. "I was totally amazed, and not only at the amount of items, but at the way each box was decorated."



A sampling of homemade cards designed by the students and included in every donation box.

"Even more inspiring was that every box included handmade cards by the students," added Paquette. "We know the troops will enjoy reading these cards that add a special touch to every box."

McCaffrey and Paquette said that this is the largest donation to AAP so far. "We appreciate the hard work of the students and the leadership of the teachers and school personnel who coordinated this project," said McCaffrey.

The project, which included students from 28 classes, was led by kindergarten teacher Joan Sperry (who formerly worked at the Lab), and sixth grade teacher Judy Larsen, with support from Nassakeag Principal Gail Casciano and Assistant Principal Jim Williams. The venture is meant to inspire children to be active in their community, and quite simply, to just do nice things for people.



AAP volunteers (from left), Kelly Backofen (Production Services Division), John McCaffrey (Photon Sciences Directorate), and Michael Paquette (Facility Operations Office) load the boxes of donated items onto a truck to transport them back to the Lab and prepare them for shipping to U.S. military personnel serving overseas.

"We are trying to instill in the children that every good deed starts a good chain reaction," said Sperry. "Each time they do something nice for someone we recognize them by adding their name to a link on a paper chain. It gives them a sense of accomplishment." Sperry proudly displays the paper chain in the hallway outside her classroom. Chains from other classrooms can also be seen winding up and down the hallways of the school.

Larsen's sixth grade students helped the kindergartners with the project. "It really was a joint effort," she said. "My students thoroughly enjoyed helping the younger children decorate and assemble their boxes. It gave them a sense of pride and community, which is so important." Students were asked to not just bring in donated items, but to earn money to purchase items by doing chores at home. "Obviously, they were happy to comply," added Larsen as she looked at the large stack of boxes.



BNL AdoptaPlatoon volunteers Michael Paquette (left), John McCaffrey (center) and Kelly Backofen (right), present Nassakeag Elementary School Principal Gail Casciano (third from left), Assistant Principal Jim Williams (second from left), and teachers Judy Larsen (third from right) and Joan Sperry (second from right) with certificates and collectible military coins from the Brookhaven Veterans Association as tokens of appreciation for their leadership in helping students gather donations for the Lab's AdoptaPlatoon program.

When asked what this project meant to them personally, the students readily responded with comments such as, "I'm happy to help our soldiers," "Please stay safe," and, "Now the soldiers won't have holes in their socks because we sent them new ones."

Deeming the project a huge success, the teachers plan to do it again next year.

"We appreciate the hard work of the students and teachers," said Paquette. "These donated items that most of us take for granted really make a difference to those away from home serving and protecting our country."